



## **Guidance for Conducting mCLASS® Acadience® Assessments**

### **in the Fall of 2020 During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

#### **Overview and Context**

In this time of uncertainty, we need to be especially clear about our purpose(s) for conducting assessment. We want to be explicit regarding the decisions we wish to make and the questions we need to answer with assessment data.

What follows are guidelines from Acadience Learning for conducting Acadience assessments during the fall of the 2020 school year where remote testing or modified scenarios may be necessary. This guidance will describe the purpose for fall data collection, practical and equity considerations related to conducting assessment, and directions for our research that will examine the impact of COVID-19 on student performance, including the impact of adjustments made to assessment. These guidelines are provided in response to requests for information regarding conducting assessments during these unprecedented times.

The primary purpose of collecting fall assessment data is to determine student instructional needs so that instructional planning may occur to ensure growth and development. As such, the fall benchmark assessment is not just a screening for risk. We understand that assessing may be particularly challenging in our current pandemic context and may be impossible for some schools. However, we find that in order to provide the best instruction for students after disrupted educational situations, districts need to be able to identify, support, and evaluate students in need of additional instruction in order to become proficient in critical academic skills. It is best not to make assumptions about learning loss. Not all students will experience skill loss. Expect that school disruption will have varying impacts on student skills. Some students may have experienced growth, while others may have fallen behind in their skills.

The focus of our assessment given this purpose is to answer the following questions:

- 1. What are the students' skills now, and are students on track to becoming successful in their academic skills (e.g., reading, mathematics)?** There is a need to determine students' present levels of performance relative to benchmark expectations as soon as practical for planning purposes. This information will help us make good decisions about which students need additional instructional support and in what skill areas.

Corroborate findings with other available data sources. The fall benchmark data will also give us a starting place for goal setting.

- 2. Is the student making adequate progress toward important reading outcomes?** For example, use Acadience Reading K–6 benchmarks and Pathways of Progress to set individual student learning goals and monitor students' progress toward those goals. Use progress monitoring in a more targeted and strategic fashion. This may mean monitoring some students less frequently depending upon resources. Consider an interim check-in for students between the fall and winter benchmark assessment. Out-of-level monitoring may be needed for some students. Consider how to best leverage the use of Acadience Reading Survey and Diagnostic assessments to be very strategic. More information about progress monitoring is available [here](#).

These questions are consistent with our Outcomes-Driven Model, but here we need to approach answering them more strategically and with greater efficiency. Given these questions, conducting a benchmark assessment as soon as possible and as efficiently as possible is a high priority. We recommend that follow-up diagnostic assessment be used very judiciously and only for those students with greatest need *when/if* educators are unclear about what to target for instruction.

## **Practical Considerations**

Schools across the nation are planning for a wide range of instructional delivery models in the fall. These models will require teachers to alter many of their typical teaching strategies and routines. Students will learn new protocols and procedures (e.g., social distancing, virtual meeting, a hybrid of remote and in-person learning, and altered schedules or calendars). For this reason, we advise giving both teachers and students some time to assimilate to these new routines and work out any challenges before universal screening begins. We recommend initiating your assessment plan after students have been in school for enough time to establish a rapport and comfort with their new tools or procedures. For example, you may wish to wait to begin assessing students until after 7-10 days of instruction in the new "classroom" situation. The need for this adjustment time must be balanced with the need to determine current levels of performance and make instructional and resource allocation decisions quickly. Making assessments a routine part of what is done at the school and not a big deal (e.g., creating an atmosphere of normalization) will help.

Assessment conditions will likely mirror the options for schooling this fall. As such, assessment may be in person, online, or may be a hybrid approach. Conditions may shift pending spikes in the virus outbreak, so it is best to consider how to prepare for each option. We recommend that educators prioritize the assessment of critical skills (i.e., reading/language arts and math) and work toward completing assessment accurately, quickly, and efficiently. Adequate training and pre-planning will maximize the likelihood that this will occur.

With respect to using data to plan instruction, we recommend addressing instructional gaps through a combination of Tier 1 adjustments and small group intervention. In instances where large percentages of students are Below or Well Below Benchmark, Tier 1 intervention is the most practical and efficient target of opportunity. Provide targeted intensive support only for those students with the greatest needs.

### **Health and Safety Considerations**

The need for safety precautions might change as we learn more about the virus. Assessments should be conducted in as safe a manner as possible. The best approach for in-person assessment is to follow school and/or district policy regarding social distancing and wearing of masks. It may take some time to become accustomed to the use of masks, and assessors may want to try clear masks and face shields. Sitting 6 feet apart is new to assessment. Typically, the student and assessor are close to each other. Under social distancing and/or remote assessment conditions, we recommend assessors monitor students and consider the impact of distance on student performance.

### **Equity Considerations**

We want to ensure equity and access for all students. As such, we recommend that schools provide maximum flexibility with assessment options. Considerations include what type of equipment, internet service, adult supervision, and privacy is needed for the assessment options that will be used. Some options may present concerns related to access for many of the children who need additional school support and whose home situations are unable to provide the equipment required to conduct remote assessment. Schools/districts should consider alternative ways to accomplish the assessment, or provide the necessary equipment and materials to families so the assessment may be completed.

### **Options for Conducting Assessment**

***In-Person Assessment (face to face).*** If schools begin the fall with face-to-face instruction, we recommend conducting the beginning-of-year benchmark assessment. We recommend flexibility with the benchmark window. The beginning-of-year benchmark will provide important information for support decisions and will assist in planning for the school year. This benchmark assessment data will provide educators with information about student needs and the impact of school closures on student skills. If availability of in-person assessment is limited, we recommend prioritizing the use of in-person assessment with those students for whom you have the greatest concern and assessing remaining students using remote assessment.

***Remote Assessment (not face to face).*** We have received requests for information regarding remote or online testing. There is no way to control all of the factors that will impact the assessment results due to vast differences across households with regard to technology and availability of an adult to supervise/monitor the assessment. That being said, we value the fact that

educators wish to keep their assessment going and we would like to be supportive. As such, we offer a number of ideas for accomplishing assessment remotely. Options are described in greater detail with the information specific to each of the Acadience assessments that follows this overview. For each option, parent/caregiver support is recommended, at least for setting up the environment, but also for monitoring to help the assessment goes smoothly. Basic set-up options might include:

- Screen sharing where the student is on a computer or tablet with sound via computer, tablet, or phone. With computer screens and an internet connection, some tests may be conducted by showing student materials on a computer or tablet screens, similar to how a Kindle book may look. Assessors may use a mouse cursor or remote pointer for tracking assistance during the assessment when screen sharing.
- Paper versions of student materials provided to the student at home, with the student on a smart phone or other device using tools such as FaceTime or Zoom.
- With Acadience LNF and NWF measures especially, you may also want to consider taking these steps to ensure you can see where students are pointing as they read:
  - Download the student materials for the appropriate grade and time of year from [here](#).
  - Put the student materials file into your videoconferencing tool's chat box.
  - Ask your student to share their screen. Caregivers may need to help, especially when you're assessing young students.
  - Ask your student or the caregiver to open the file and scroll to the appropriate form.
  - Explain to your student that they should use their cursor to point to the words as they read.

**Hybrid Approach.** A hybrid approach means that some assessment might be conducted face to face and some might be conducted remotely. This option would most likely be used if schooling is conducted via a hybrid approach (e.g., some in person and some online). If the availability of in-person assessment is limited, we recommend prioritizing in-person assessment with those students for whom you have the greatest concern and assessing remaining students using remote assessment.

## **How to Conduct Remote Assessment**

Logistical considerations for remote assessment include management of materials required to conduct the assessment, scheduling the meeting time, and understanding and communicating the roles of the people involved in the assessment process.

**Materials** needed for remote testing with mCLASS Acadience Reading K-6 include the following:

- Touch screen tablet or laptop with a browser for mCLASS; login at <https://mclass.amplify.com/assessment>
- Computer with camera and speaker for video conferencing
- Virtual meeting software (e.g., Zoom, Google Meet, GoToMeeting, FaceTime, Skype, Join.me, Adobe Connect, or any other district/school recommended and supported meeting platform)

We recommend creating a schedule for assessment meeting times. Consider creating a sign-up via Google Docs or offer parents/caregivers at least three possible times to choose from. Once a time is determined, send a meeting invitation with the link.

Everyone involved (e.g., school personnel, students, and parents/caregivers) has a role to play. We recommend specifying and communicating the expectations for those roles so that an optimal experience occurs. We recommend that schools/districts attempt to standardize their approach within the school or district. In order to create an optimal testing environment, the roles of each participant are described here:

***School personnel/assessor role.*** We recommend that school personnel provide information and notification regarding remote assessment to parents/caregivers in advance of conducting the assessment. Consider sending home a letter explaining the caregiver/parent role in assessment. Ask parents/caregivers to provide a space with minimal distractions for the student and to have the computer or tablet device ready along with a phone on hand. A sample letter is provided in this guidance.

Before starting the assessment, be sure the student has any necessary assessment materials. Student materials should be placed in a sealed envelope marked to indicate that it should not be opened before the assessment. Materials may be sent home via mail or delivered to families via school-based pick up.

If screen sharing, check that the format of the document will fit the available screen. Keep in mind that while the student materials may be made available digitally/electronically, the assessor needs to have a tablet for scoring purposes with mCLASS. Finally, note if the assessment was completed in person or remotely by using the new selection button in the Notes feature.

***Parent/Caregiver role.*** A parent/caregiver/adult in the home may need to assist with set-up. A quiet, distraction-free space for the student to complete assessment tasks without interruption is best. Families should plan for 15 minutes per student. Many assessments include the support of a proctor - someone to help with all technology issues and help the student to do their best. Parents/caregivers together with the assessor should identify who the proctor is.

The assessor will need to explain the assessment process and inform the parents/caregivers of the limits of the support they may provide. Listed below are suggestions for explaining the parents'/caregivers' role in the assessment.

- Explain that the purpose of the assessment is to gather accurate information about the student's essential early literacy and reading skills. The information will be used to help plan instruction for their student.
- Inform the parent/caregiver that the assessment is standardized. This means that it is a requirement of the assessment that specific directions be given, timing be exact, and that any directions and prompts to the student be provided by the assessor. It is important that the student respond independently, without any additional help or prompting from observers.
- Acknowledge that it is natural to want to help their student. Reassure parents/caregivers that if their student performs differently during the assessment than what they see the student do at home, you will document their comments about any differences they notice once the assessment is completed.
- Provide time for the parents/caregivers to ask questions related to the assessment.
- If the parent/caregiver provides prompts or assistance to the student after the assessment begins, you may need to provide a gentle reminder to the parent (e.g., "Remember Mr./Ms. \_\_\_\_\_, we need to let \_\_\_\_\_ respond without any help.")
- Thank the parent/caregiver for their help. Let the parent/caregiver know that you will score the assessment after the meeting, so will not provide immediate results. (If the assessment results will be provided at a later time, for example during an upcoming parent-teacher conference, or in a parent letter to be sent out after the assessment, you can let the parent/caregiver know that.)

**Child role.** We want students to do their best during the assessment. During remote assessment, students must let the assessor know if they cannot clearly hear and/or see during the assessment, just like during an in-person assessment.

Configurations for remote scoring may vary but may include the following:

- Scoring on an mCLASS touch-enabled tablet while using another computer device for the meeting to see the student and to screen share.
- Scoring on a tablet plus a phone for audio. If using a phone, it is ideal for both the assessor and student to be hands free. The child should not need to hold the phone but rather use the speakerphone option or earbuds/headphones.

## **Maximizing Assessment Fidelity and Validity**

To maximize the likelihood of obtaining useful assessment data, aim to limit or minimize departures from standardization as much as possible. Document any departures from standardization for consideration when interpreting the assessment data. Consider how adjustments made to administration conditions may impact the reliability and validity, and appropriately adjust conclusions or recommendations adding notes of caution where needed. The standards (i.e., benchmarks) used for interpretation will remain the same.

For all assessments, we recommend that assessors review the information in the Assessment Manuals relevant to accommodations used during the assessment. For each assessment the information is located in a section labeled "Approved Accommodations." These sections explain accommodations that may be provided to students. For example, enlarged print for students with visual impairments. Accommodations that are unapproved and may impact interpretation also are discussed. In instances where unapproved accommodations are used, intra-individual comparisons may be considered more appropriate than comparing student data relative to benchmarks.

Everyone must be trained to administer and score with high fidelity. We recommend having your Acadience Mentors in the school/district use the Assessment Accuracy Checklists to support training needs, provide booster training sessions, and conduct fidelity checks. Assessment Accuracy Checklists can be found in Appendix A of the Acadience Reading K-6 Assessment Manual. Examine fidelity of data collection in an ongoing fashion.

Pre-correct for parents/caregivers providing too much support during the assessment. We recommend communicating the purpose of the assessment to parents and other caregivers (see previous section). Consider the use of an analogy. For example, at regular physical health check-ups, parents want an accurate estimate of where their child is at so that the doctor knows whether or not the child needs intervention to improve their physical health. The same is true for these educational check-ups. Without accurate data, needs may not become known and addressed. Obtaining accurate data helps us to know where we are at so we can move forward from there. Parents/caregivers need to understand the important role they play and the scope of that role. Make sure the parent knows that the data will not be a part of the student's grade.

Finally, we realize the challenge of doing an assessment remotely that would have normally been done in person. Assessors may miss the opportunity to obtain information that would have been observed during an in-person assessment.

## **Resources to Use Data Effectively**

Resource needs with respect to data interpretation and use will depend on the experience of teachers/educators. Some of your best resources are going to be the experienced teachers and Acadience Mentors in the school/district. We recommend

that educators use the assessment data to set meaningful, ambitious, and attainable goals. Pathways of Progress, currently available for Acadience Reading K–6, will be very useful in this context. Additional information about Pathways is available [here](#).

## **Other Resources**

We recommend the mCLASS Acadience Reading Lexile Report to provide information that parents and families can use to access reading resources online. The Lexile Report provides a Lexile level for each student, which provides a good estimate of books that would be at an appropriate reading level. An online resource to help find appropriate books based on the student's Lexile is available [here](#).

Parent-friendly information about choosing books for children can also be found at [Reading Rockets](#). The Reading Rockets website also has a section dedicated to [parents](#).

In addition, the Institute for Education Sciences Regional Educational Laboratory Program has a website [here](#) devoted to resources for families and caregivers in support of children's math skill development.

## **Research on Impacts**

Acadience Learning and Amplify will continue to examine the data obtained throughout this period for patterns. We are implementing ways to track the manner in which assessment data were collected (e.g., in person or remote) as those data are entered. We may consider a more longitudinal examination of student growth, such as measuring growth over a two-year period. Finally, we will have the opportunity to examine differential impact across skills.

## **Conclusion**

If you choose to conduct assessments during this time period, these are our guidelines for this present time. As data are collected and we learn more about the types of experiences and outcomes that result from these implementations, our guidance may evolve to create recommendations aligned with optimal testing experiences. Note that these recommendations are nonstandard accommodations for most Acadience Learning assessments in a nonstandard time. As such, caution is urged in the interpretation of these data and we encourage notation of the experience (e.g., via remote meeting or any other modification). Because all of your data will likely be collected in this same format, the reports can be useful to inform instruction and identify students who may need additional support compared to other students in the classroom or school. Data collected using remote assessment procedures and aggregated for use at a school, district, or state level for important system-wide educational decisions should be identified clearly as remote assessment data to describe the conditions under which the assessments were given.



Be sure to use the Notes feature to provide information about whether the testing was conducted remotely.

Our purpose, to improve student outcomes, remains the same and we are committed to supporting educators and educational systems in working to achieve that goal. We will continue to provide resources as we learn from this process. If you have additional questions regarding this guidance document or need further assistance with Acadience assessments, please contact us at [info@acadiencelarning.org](mailto:info@acadiencelarning.org) or [help@amplify.com](mailto:help@amplify.com).

## Guidance Specific to mCLASS Acadience Reading K–6

1. For measures that require student materials (**LNF, RAN, NWF, ORF, Retell**), the assessor does the following:
  - a. Download the appropriate student materials from [Acadience Learning](#).
  - b. Have the tablet ready to score the selected measure with mCLASS.
  - c. When you are face-to-face online with the student and audio and video are established and working, take a few minutes to establish rapport with the student and describe the purpose of the session.
  - d. Pull up the appropriate student materials for that student on your computer screen.
  - e. When you have the appropriate student materials on your screen, give the standardized directions.
  - f. At the point in the directions where it says to show the form to the student, share the window with appropriate student materials with the student.
  - g. Follow along and score on touchscreen tablet device.
  - h. As mentioned above, you can also try the option of dropping the materials into the chat for the student to display and follow along.
2. For measures that do not require student materials (**FSF, PSF**), the assessor does the following:
  - a. Have the tablet ready to score the selected measure with mCLASS.
  - b. When you are face-to-face with the student with audio and video working, give the standardized directions.
  - c. Follow along and score on the touchscreen tablet device using mCLASS.
3. The **Maze** assessment may be administered to the student using mCLASS.
  - a. When conducting the Maze assessment remotely using mCLASS, the assessor must provide the student with the appropriate [login page](https://mclass.amplify.com/student) and their username and password. The assessor will then give the standardized directions to the student and instruct the student to begin.
  - b. When assessing the student with mCLASS, indicate in the notes section if the assessment was administered in person or remote. Please see illustration below.

The image displays two side-by-side screenshots of the mCLASS 'Notes' form. Both forms have a blue header with the title 'Notes' and buttons for 'Cancel' and 'Save'. The left form is titled 'In-person' and has the 'In-person' radio button selected. The right form is titled 'Remote' and has the 'Remote' radio button selected. Both forms have a text area for notes below the radio buttons.

## Sample Parent/Guardian Letter

Dear [parent/guardian name],

As we begin this new school year, our teachers will be meeting individually with all students to do a brief assessment as a progress check on their reading skills. The purpose of this assessment is to find out what students have learned and can do independently and what we still need to teach. With the changes in our past school year your child may have forgotten some things and that's typical. We typically do this assessment with each student in person, but this year we will be doing the assessment through a virtual meeting. To make this happen we will need help from an adult at your home. The meeting will take approximately 15-20 minutes including set up. Please select the best time for you and your child on this Google Doc link [insert link or hyperlink].

Here are the materials you will need:

1. Computer, laptop, or tablet. Headphones or earbuds, computer speaker and microphone are fine too. Alternatively have a phone available for audio.
2. Internet connection
3. Quiet space free from distractions as much as possible
4. If you have received a packet of materials identified for use during this session please have that available. It contains a few papers you will leave with the child. The packet of materials for the meeting session should not be opened before the session.
5. If your child wears glasses or hearing aids please make sure they have them for this session.
6. If your child has a 504 or IEP that includes testing accommodations, please contact the school for further guidance on accommodations.

Laptop, desktops and tablets are all great options. A mobile phone will be too small for the student to complete the tasks, but may be workable for those tasks that only need audio. You may need to stack a laptop on books or some other creative solution so please take a few minutes before our meeting to have that ready. If using a tablet please have a stand or a way for the child to see it upright.

Here is what you (or the adult who will be helping) will need to do:

1. If possible, please set up your computer and phone in a space with minimal distractions.
2. Make sure the internet connection, microphone/speaker or headphones and computer camera are working, and that the camera is in a position to see the student and for the student to be able to see the screen at eye level
3. Standby for a quick audio and camera check before we get started.
4. If a packet of papers has been provided for the meeting, set the papers face down in front of the student. (If you need papers they will be provided before the meeting.)
5. If your child is in kindergarten or first grade, or if you think your presence will help your child to stay focused and pay attention, you are invited to stay for the assessment. During the assessment, you may help your child to pay attention, but it is important that the student answer all of the questions and do all of the reading independently, that is, without any help. By seeing what students can and cannot do independently your child's teachers will better know how to tailor their instruction to meet your child's needs.

If you have any questions please feel free to reach out by phone or email.